

VZCZCXRO8348
PP RUEHCI
DE RUEHKA #1920 3450337
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 110337Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5779
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0363
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 8220
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1951
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9433
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 1064

C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 001920

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DEPT FOR SCA/PB AND SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER VISITS BANGLADESH

Classified By: CDA a.i. Geeta Pasi, Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (U) SUMMARY: Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee December 2 visited cyclone-affected areas of Bangladesh and met with government leaders to discuss bilateral issues including trade, water-sharing and security. Mukherjee announced a temporary waiver of India's ban on rice exports to Bangladesh in light of the crop losses suffered due to Cyclone Sidr. He also invited Bangladesh Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Chowdhury to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Forum in New Delhi April 3-4.
END SUMMARY

12. (C) A/DCM and ConOff (note taker) met with Sanjeev Singla (protect), first secretary at the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, to discuss the December 2 visit to Bangladesh by Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee. Singla reported that during the day-long trip, Mukherjee visited some of the areas worst hit by the cyclone, and observed the delivery of 36 metric tons of Indian-donated relief goods. In response to a Government of Bangladesh (GOB) appeal for food, Mukherjee announced that India would waive temporarily its ban on rice exports to Bangladesh to allow the sale of 500,000 metric tons for post-cyclone emergencies. Singla could not confirm that this figure would include purchases from India by other international donors, but believed it would. The External Affairs Minister also announced that India would fund the reconstruction of ten coastal villages. Singla noted that there had been considerable debate in India over whether to extend a lifeline to Bangladesh prior to Mukherjee's announcement of India's aid package. Singla also stated that food donations from India had been delayed because the GOB was slow to clear Indian naval vessels into Bangladesh waters and because of logistical barriers at the Port of Chittagong.

13. (C) External Affairs Minister Mukherjee met with Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury to discuss a series of outstanding issues, including trade imbalance, water-sharing and security. Mukherjee announced India will import 2 million pieces of ready-made garments from Bangladesh duty-free, and he invited the Foreign Affairs Adviser to attend the SAARC Forum in April in New Delhi. Due to a last-minute cancellation, Mukherjee was unable to meet with Army Chief General Moeen. Singla said that the Army Chief is tentatively scheduled to visit India in February, however.

14. (C) According to Singla, the External Affairs Minister and Foreign Adviser agreed that neither country should provide sanctuary to terrorist or insurgent groups. However, Singla indicated that India was not satisfied with the GOB's

cooperation on counterterrorism, and stated that USG assistance in persuading the GOB to be more responsive would be helpful. Specifically, India had asked for individuals wanted on terrorism charges in India to be handed over to New Delhi, in exchange for Bangladeshi fugitives in India. The GOB maintained that there were no such individuals in Bangladesh.

15. (C) First Secretary Singla probed A/DCM about possible discontent with the senior ranks of the Bangladeshi Army. Singla cited a Division Commanders' meeting several weeks ago, in which senior officers allegedly expressed dissatisfaction with General Moeen's handling of political developments. (COMMENT: While we are aware that some senior military officials do not fully support General Moeen, we do not have any indication that there has been an increase in discontent. END COMMENT.)

16. (C) COMMENT: The Indian External Affairs Minister's visit, the result of an invitation extended on the margins of the November 23-25 Commonwealth Summit in Kampala, Uganda, was put together quickly. According to Singla, the GOB did not expect the External Affairs Minister to take up the invitation so soon. Mukherjee hails from West Bengal, which borders Bangladesh to the west.
Pasi